



# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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ONE DOLLAR

The Eastern Shore  
*A Delicate Treasure*



The Eastern Shore  
*A Delicate Treasure*

# Special Photo Issue

*Researched and compiled by  
Dwight Dyke and Virginia Shepherd  
Designed by Emily Pels*



Cover: photo by Dwight Dyke.

Left: Ring-billed gull; Above: Willis Wharf, Northampton Co.; photos by Dwight Dyke.

***“When you leave  
Norfolk and come  
across the bridge,  
you go back  
a hundred years.”***

*Bill Gaars, Quimby  
Occupation: Retired Navy  
Age: 49*

## Introduction

**I**n this special photo issue featuring the Eastern Shore of Virginia, we sent freelance photographer Dwight Dyke on a pilgrimage to another world on the other side of the Chesapeake Bay. In these pages, Dwight has captured images of Northampton and Accomack Counties, the people who live there and the voices that speak to a way of life that is so rich

and different from our own. In addition, our own nongame biologist, Karen Terrwilliger, who lives in Locustville, shares with us her perceptive view of the natural world which makes this land of sea and sand and marsh such a rare and delicate treasure. In this place full of such natural changes, we can't help but hope it really never changes.





Above: Willis Wharf, Northampton Co.  
Below left: Jim Green. Photos by Dwight Dyke.



*“It was early morning with the sun just breaking over the horizon. There was water in the marsh grass and the sun was hitting this water, making all these little spots. I’ll always remember that.”*

*Jim Green, Onancock  
Age: 49*



Sunrise on Assateague Island; photo by F. E. Gatewood.





Little blue heron; photo by Vinyard Bros.

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*“H ere  
we  
got  
water on both  
sides and that’s  
what I like. I can  
go out bay fish-  
ing and I can go  
out crabbing on  
the sea side.  
Catch my own  
bait—never  
bought bait.”*

*Jim Green*









*Sika deer on the Eastern Shore,  
photo by Dwight Dyke.*

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*“I live on a big  
old farm—it’s  
125 acres—  
right on the water, and  
you wake up in the  
morning and deer are  
going across your  
lawn. I’d miss that if I  
moved into a town.”*

*Bill Schwendeman,  
Melfa  
Occupation: Woodworker  
Age: 31*



*Farm near Cape Charles; photo by Dwight Dyke.*





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*“P*eople just  
take their  
time doing  
things; they’re not in  
such a hurry.”

*Bill Schwendeman*



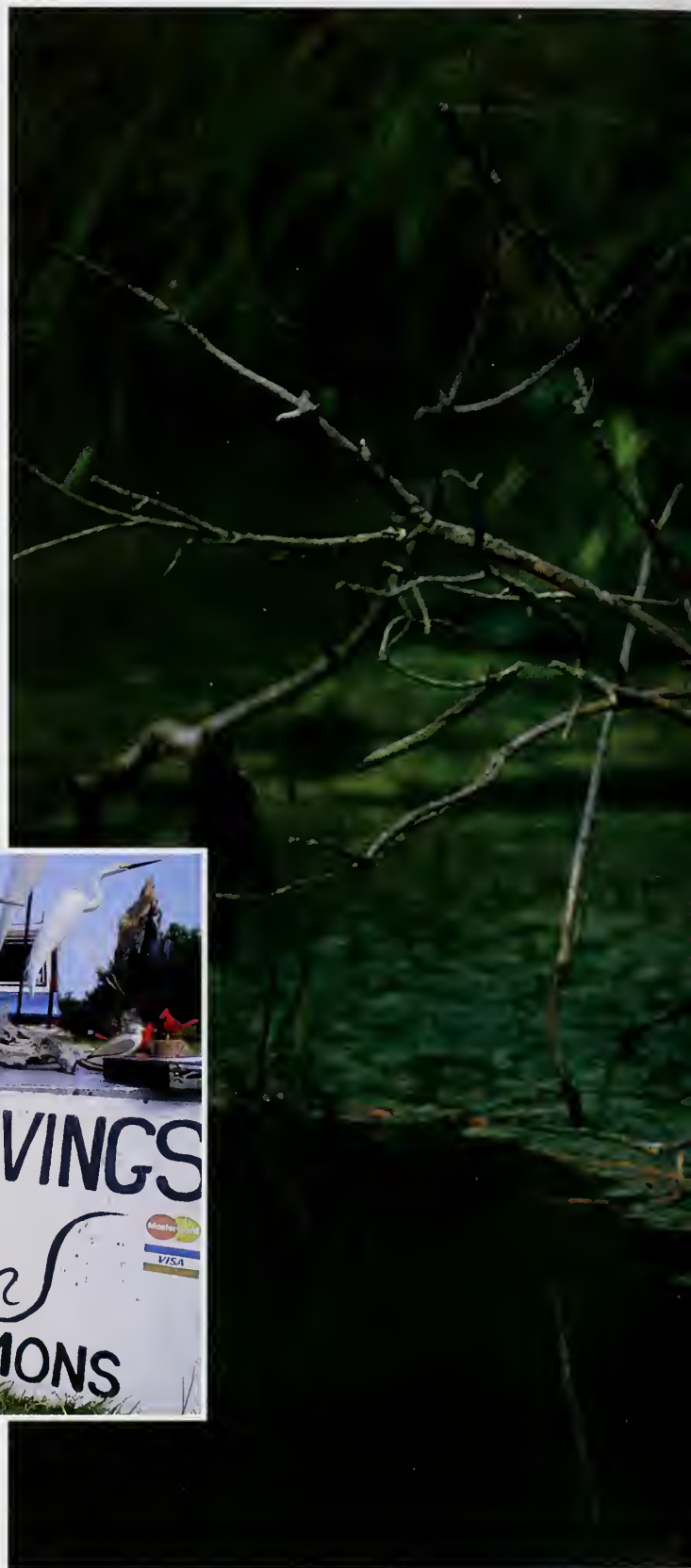




*Left: Grocery store at Pungoteague. Above: Commercial fishing boats at Oyster. Photos by Dwight Dyke.*

*“I always liked space; I like to see the sky, water and trees and not be in cramped housing. We have 45 acres and my wife thinks like I do; we love the water—we’re not far from the ocean and we can go anytime we wish. Just a nice free life doing what we want to do. As a result, I’m not making a lot of money, but it’s worth it. It’s really worth it.”*

Matt Cormons, Parksley  
Occupation: wood carver, naturalist  
Age: 50



Matt Cormons at work; photo by Dwight Dyke.

Black-crowned night heron; photo by F. E. Gatewood, Jr.









Top: Chincoteague pony penning, an annual event in the summer attracting thousands of people to the Shore.

Above: Evangela Stevens of Cape Charles.

Top right: Wachapreague wharf.

Bottom right: Wharf at Oyster. Photos by Dwight Dyke.

*“The Eastern Shore is changing with the newer generation. The older people, they’ve been isolated for so long because this was essentially the end of the peninsula.*

*They were always able to live off the land, live off the farming and the water, which*





*was fine but now they're experiencing culture shock with all the 'come here's' coming down and demanding certain things that these people never demanded before . . .*

*The typical Eastern Shore people are all hunters and fishermen, just about."*

Matt Cormons







Above: Broadway Baptist Church.  
 Above right: Larry Giddens, Accomack.  
 Facing page: Accomack County Courthouse. Photos by Dwight Dyke.

*“One of the key things I like about living here is we’re away from the cities. It’s really one of the best places I can think of to raise your kids. I’ve been here all my life and I love it . . .*

*When I want to relax and think about my own favorite spot, I imagine myself being down by this pond and just laying on the bank, taking my time, listening to the frogs and grasshoppers.”*

*Larry Giddens, Accomack  
 Occupation: policeman  
 Age: 35*





# A Natural Treasure



By Karen Terwilliger

*Karen Terwilliger, supervisor of VDGIF's nongame wildlife programs, lives and works in Locustville on the Eastern Shore. Her thoughts on the natural*

*treasures of the Shore bring to light its importance and priceless value, especially in terms of the role its marshes, its secluded bays, barrier islands, and people play in sustaining, protecting, and nurturing our wildlife.*

**A**s you leave Virginia Beach and the booming metropolis of Tidewater and drive onto the 17-mile backbone called the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel, the only thread that connects the East-

ern Shore to the rest of Virginia, you immediately feel yourself being distanced from the stress of the fast-paced world. These 17 miles span the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, the opening to Virginia's largest estuary. At night, seagulls are attracted by the lights and sit on all the poles here. We have so many different species of birds just utilizing these tunnel islands and the man-made structures of the bridge. Bottlenose dolphins, loggerhead sea turtles, Ridley sea turtles, green sea turtles, and leatherback turtles all swim in these waters, and if you're ever





choose to get off the road and really stop and see what Virginia's Eastern Shore is all about.

The first taste of the Eastern Shore is when you pop over the high-rise bridge and look down on Fisherman's Island, a beautiful, small—the southernmost—barrier island which is protected by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). It has a unique breeding avifauna, the only place that brown pelicans now breed in Virginia is right here on Fisherman's Island. Glossy ibis, white ibis, many different types of herons and egrets all call the island home. Royal terns, sandwich terns (one of the largest colonies of these in Virginia), skimmers, gull-billed terns, common terns, and piping plovers all nest here. It's a haven for waterfowl in the back marshes. The nice thing about it is that there are very few mammalian predators and the birds are relatively successful on this island.

We have a lot of cooperative projects going on at Fisherman's Island which is part of the larger Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge. We

have ongoing woodcock and waterfowl studies. This is one of the first sites where peregrine falcons were reintroduced. We now have a resident pair of falcons who raised four young last year. We have raptor banding sites manned by volunteers. We cooperate with William and Mary, Earthwatch, LTER, the Nature Conservancy, and survey and monitor all the colonial birds and shorebirds that nest here.

And once you pop over the final little bridge past Fisherman's Island, you're on the mainland of the Eastern Shore. You're right at the southern tip of the Delmarva peninsula—it's a critical peninsula—over 70 miles long and on its very southern tip, it's extremely narrow. The entire peninsula acts like a funnel, and hundreds of thousands of migrating northern passerines, raptors, waterfowl, all the different kinds of migrating birds, use the peninsula during the fall as a huge geographical funnel. And when they reach the very southern tip in Virginia right here at the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge and several miles north of it, there are

going to see them, this is where you'll do it. Fishermen flock to the tunnel islands with their boats, commercial fishermen with spotter planes harvest menhaden from the Bay. Gill nets and other types of nets are strung across these miles of waters to harvest its bountiful aquatic resources.

The Bay Bridge Tunnel is quite an extensively traveled route both from the air and by cars and trucks, but few people

*Above: Brown pelicans flying; photo by Bill Lea.  
Left: Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel entrance; photo by David Liebman.  
Right: Nesting brown pelicans on Fisherman's Island; photo by Pels.*





tremendous concentrations of birds. That's why the Eastern Shore National Wildlife Refuge was established, to protect these concentrations, to protect the habitat where these birds forage, rest and stop over before they cross over the Bay.

We're conducting habitat and population studies now with the Refuge. I am monitoring migratory birds here. We have, in cooperation with the Virginia Society of Ornithology, sponsored for 26 consecutive years a banding site that last year banded 3,000 birds (that's been the lowest we've ever banded). Banding began in the 60s when we had absolutely no idea where birds were moving, or what the story of migration was. And since that time our banding station and a few other long-term ones

have provided an incredible amount of information on where the different species go, what time of year they migrate, and what patterns they use.

When you pass the Refuge and head north, you're immediately struck by the importance of agriculture. Agriculture is one of the main industries on the Shore, with large fields everywhere, bordered with loblolly pine, and maritime forests, the climax







Top left: White ibis; photo by Bill Lea.  
Bottom left: Map of Eastern Shore of Virginia; graphics by Pels.

Top: Posting beach to keep beachgoers from disturbing nesting birds; photo by Pels.

Top right: Piping plover eggs; photo by Pels.

Above: Piping plover on nest in enclosure fence designed to keep mammalian predators away; photo by Bob Cross.

forests. Nothing but flat, beautifully cultivated fields, with productive, sandy soils, perfect for raising 2-3 crops a year.

The Eastern Shore is well-suited to a lot of different types of crops because of the fairly sandy soil, but you're immediately struck by the size of the farms. It's a very narrow coun-

ty, and the farms border the shoreline of both the Bay and the seaside. For the most part, Northampton County has a lot of environmentally conscious old established families who have been very good stewards of the land and also a mix of newcomers, the "come here's" as the Eastern Shore folks call them, who are trying to escape the "real world" and the havoc of the city. A lot of Northerners come down for the peace and tranquility and pristine areas on the Shore and many also share an appreciation for its natural resources.

Northampton County is still pretty well undeveloped, but the last decade saw a lot of

scurrying and a lot of major changes in land use. Just like everywhere else in the 80s, with the booming economy, development was really at a high point and with the passage of the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, a lot of landowners and investors and potential investors immediately subdivided to try to make sure they would be able to develop if the Preservation Act went through. This resulted in a tremendous boom in the number of lots, platted in both Accomack and Northampton Counties.

This sent the citizens and the governments of both Northampton and Accomack Counties into a tizzy worrying about the weight of all this potential development and a lot of good things have come out of that. There's an excellent citizens group over here now called the Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore, and a lot of land use zoning and ordinance changes went into effect as a result which restricted the numbers of lots and the size of the lots to protect the water quality and to protect conservation and sensitive areas. So, the people over here have really tried to meet and compromise with development.

The geography of the Shore is what really sets it apart. The Shore is attached to Maryland; it's only attached to Virginia by that 17-mile thread of man-made bridges and tunnels. It has a number of wildlife species and plant species that reach the northern extent of their range here in Virginia, and vice versa. So, it's really a very interesting biological area, it's got a lot of diversity.

But the real unique feature of the Shore is that it's protected by a barrier island system—over 70 miles of a chain of barrier islands. Most of the islands



are protected by private ownership of the Nature Conservancy. Many others are protected by the USFWS and a few are protected by the state Department of Conservation and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF). This chain of barrier islands is the last undeveloped, pristine, undisturbed chain of barrier islands we have along the North American Atlantic coast.

The islands themselves support an incredible diversity of wildlife on their sandy beaches. They have the vast majority, if not close to all of Virginia's colonial nesting birds, and all our shore birds. Behind the islands we have extensive salt marshes—just beautiful, vast salt marshes—where waterfowl nest and breed in the summer. And in the fall and the winter, that's where many of the waterfowl and other birds find shelter and forage and the rest-

ing stop over areas during migration. Many of these waterfowl overwinter and forage in these marshes and in the adjoining bays, the nice shallow bays that have a lot of vegetation for them to feed on.

The shallow bays themselves are nursery grounds for the saltwater fisheries that are so important to Virginia's economy. The Eastern Shore estuaries and bays that are sheltered by the barrier islands offer wonderful protection and nursery grounds for shellfish as well. These shallow bays also are absolutely full of migrating shorebirds in the spring and the fall. At low tide there are exposed mud and sand flats that are extremely rich in invertebrates, and shorebirds cover these hot spots.

The Virginia-Maryland barrier island chain has been dedicated a very special area by the Western Hemispheric Shore-

bird Reserve Network, which means that this is globally recognized as a critical area for the stopping over and feeding and resting of high concentrations of shorebirds in North America.

In Accomack County, Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is the second USFWS National Wildlife Refuge, with whom we work closely. An endangered species occurs there—the only spot where the Delmarva peninsula fox squirrel breeds or lives in Virginia is right there on Assateague. It's truly an endangered mammal. Assateague also supports one of the highest populations of breeding piping plovers in the state. We work cooperatively with USFWS to monitor and protect them.

An interesting thing about the Shore in terms of mammals is that birds obviously can fly up and down or anywhere







Left: Marsh sunset; photo by Patrick M. Collins.  
 Top: Mute swans; photo by Dwight Dyke.  
 Above: Long-billed dowitcher; photo by Vinyard Bros.

they want, but mammals are far less mobile, and since Virginia's Eastern Shore is attached to Maryland and Delaware, the mammal life here is much more similar to that of Maryland and Delaware. For example, we have no chipmunks over here, yet. If mammals are going to be here on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, they must travel south from Delaware and Maryland to colonize.

The Shore has pretty good quail populations. Obviously, the amount

of acreage in agriculture and field and forest border provides for that, and a lot of farmers see the value in keeping good cover and quail habitat and leaving idle fields and keeping good fencerows and hedgerows. But there still is the thought, actually it's the prevailing thought, that clean farming not only looks a lot nicer, but produces more. And, of course, that cuts into the wildlife benefits as well as the water quality benefits. However, I'd say in the last 10 years, with all the education and awareness of water quality and soil erosion and all the different conservation practices and tillage practices that farmers can use today, I really think it's helping the farm game.

We work with a lot of landowners providing them information on how to maintain better populations of



wildlife. And one of the first things we say is to provide more cover, and edge, and hedgerows and to try to get away from this clean farming for aesthetics. Not only does wildlife on land benefit, but so does the Bay, so does the water quality, because you're trap-

ping all that sediment and siltation that would otherwise go into the Bay. Most farmers who try this say it's worth what very little acreage it actually takes out of production.

A lot of work has also been done with farmers and landowners here to put in small ponds for waterfowl. Many farmers need irrigation here, since it's just about the only way now they can maintain 2 or 3 crops a year. So instead of just putting in a really steep bank impoundment just as an irrigation pond, we, the Fish and Wildlife Service, Ducks Unlimited, and a number of other groups have cooperated to convince

landowners to make a real pond out of it that can benefit more than just their crops and have it as a viable waterfowl, shorebird and wildlife pond.

I think one of the reasons the Eastern Shore is unique is the attitude of the people. Because so many people's livelihoods over here depend on the natural resources, whether it be farming or forestry or fishing, shellfishing, or hunting, they have a much greater appreciation for the resource.

The Shore didn't support eagle nests for a long time, but now we have seven. Most landowners are extremely cooperative. They want to do everything they can for the eagles, to keep the eagles on their property. They work very closely with us, they report to us when they see the eagles and





young, or if there's any disturbance. I think this speaks to and is representative of the overall concern for wildlife and respect for the resources here.

Every year, we, in cooperation with a number of other agencies and institutions, coordinate the inventory and monitoring, research and management (basically the protection) of the wildlife that use the barrier islands. We work closely with the landowners and survey every year all the breeding birds that utilize the beaches and marshes. We monitor them, we help put signs up in the areas that are most sensitive, so that breeding is not disrupted during the critical nesting periods on the islands. Although the islands do not receive high public use, there is



certainly enough that could potentially cause problems. The system to protect these areas has worked pretty well, although each year we still have some birds and colony sites that are disturbed. But for the most part, it's a good monitoring and management scheme.

Which brings us back to what I said before about the stewardship and respect for the resources that people here on the Shore have for their land. At the same time, however, some strongly believe the rights of the private landowner outweigh the needs of the "greater good": the "It's my land, I'm going to do with it what I want" kind of attitude. Because they're here and they see it all the time, I think they might sometimes take the abundance of their wildlife and natural resources on the Shore a bit for granted.

But, you really know an area is special if there are 2 national wildlife refuges and 3 state wildlife areas, property owned by State Parks, and a large amount of acreage both on the is-

lands and mainland protected by the Nature Conservancy. You know if all those resource agencies are working together, and have made it a priority to protect and acquire and manage that much acreage, the place is a natural treasure.

The Eastern Shore contributes a unique biological and cultural heritage to Virginia. It is truly one of the most delicate treasures of the Commonwealth.



Top left: Delmarva fox squirrel; photo by Richard Webster.

Bottom left: Great blue heron; photo by Patrick M. Collins.

Top: Peregrine falcon, photo by Rob Simpson.

Above: Bald eagle; photo by Gregory K. Scott.







Above: Chincoteague ponies.  
Above right: John Hill. Photos by Dwight Dyke.





*“I was born and raised here. When I was young there were a lot more birds and ducks. All of the birds were much more plentiful. Now if you see any more than three or four Yellow Legs at a time it’s a rarity. So you know that gives you some idea.*

*Years ago, wildlife was a big part of our diet. My father couldn’t just go to the store and buy meat because we didn’t have the money. So wildlife then was a great part of just making ends meet and putting food on the table . . .*

*It used to be—coming back to Chincoteague—it was all just bare marshland but now every-*





*body's got their signs up.*

*The whole flavor of Chincoteague has changed a lot. There's more people that's moved in and it's gone tourism. You used to know everybody on the island, now it's hard to see a face you know. So a lot of people moved in and made it their home and a lot of that is good but it don't have the same flavor that it had years ago . . .*

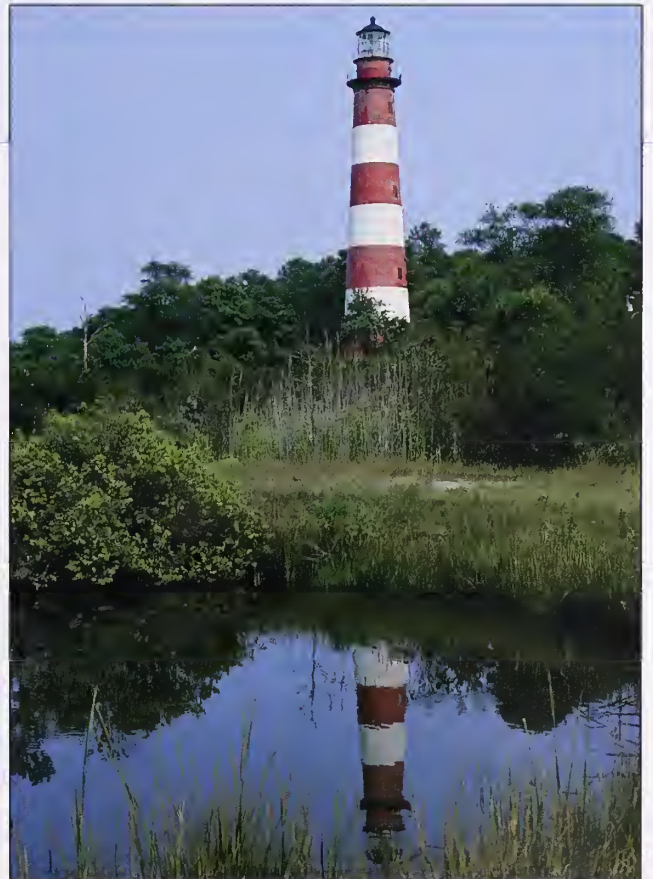
*The most important thing about here is it's laid back and it's not no rush, rush, rush . . .*

*John Hill  
Chincoteague*

*Occupation: small business proprietor  
Age: 61*







Top left: Chincoteague; photo by Dwight Dyke.  
 Above left: Construction on Chincoteague; photo by Dwight Dyke.  
 Left: Chincoteague; photo by Dwight Dyke.  
 Top: Tundra swans; photo by Patrick M. Collins.  
 Above: Sika deer, Chincoteague; photo by Dwight Dyke.  
 Right: Assateague lighthouse; photo by F. E. Gatewood.





“*W*hen I’m steady and the market’s right, I start to work about 4:00 in the morning and it lasts ‘till dark. If the market’s not so good, I’ll have half a day, but most of the time, by the time I get through doing things, it’s dark. I just go home, eat a little something and start





Left top: Willis Wharf; Northampton County; photo by Dwight Dyke.

Left bottom: Billy Hall.

Above: Chincoteague pier with oyster shells; photo by Rob Simpson.

back the next day and do it all over again.

When I was young you could go as far as you wanted to go and you could see them oysters everywhere. You don't do it anymore.

The difference nowadays is the product you got—we don't have it. Seems like every year it's just depleting so much that if some-

thing don't change in the next 5 or 10 years, it ain't gonna be hardly anybody here . . .

Everybody in this area is either kin to each other or really good friends. Here, in the dark, you used to say they roll the streets up. Nothing goes on the time it gets dark . . .

It don't take long for people here to get to know

you. I go to places like Norfolk and ask for somebody and they could be living right along side of him and they don't even know his name. You come down here and all you got to do is just ask for a person. Everybody knows who he is."

Billy Hall, Oyster  
Occupation: waterman  
Age: 39





Above: Wharf at Bayford.  
Above right: Gene Crumb (right) and friends. Photos by Dwight Dyke.





*“T he farms have posted no trespassing signs everywhere. You can’t go on a piece of land anywhere. When I was a kid you could go anywhere you please, that’s the truth. I guess the reason is the farmers don’t want people tearing up their property and if somebody got hurt, they’d be sued, you know . . .*

*I just like it here ‘cause it’s quiet and you know everybody—it’s easy living and a good life for us.”*

*Gene Crumb, Cheriton  
Occupation: waterman,  
Age: 60*





Above: Bagging clams at Oyster.  
Top right: Beach at Cape Charles.  
Right: Sarah Coleman. Photos by Dwight Dyke.





*“There’s a lot more people here than there used to be. There’s a lot more businesses coming up and I see a lot of watermen that are worried their way of life is disappearing.*

*If something happens here, everybody kinda sticks together and tries to help.*

*They used to say that nobody would ever starve to death on the Eastern Shore. I used to work a lot of Social Servicing and 15 years ago they didn’t worry so much about the government helping, because you*

*could hunt, you could fish—your mother lived next door, your grandmother lived next door. You never had to worry about anything happening to you as far as the homeless or anything like that, but I see more of that disappearing.*

*There’s more people here now and I don’t want to see progress that’s good for the Shore hurt, but I hate to see progress that’s just exploding all around, destroying the Shore.”*

*Sarah Coleman,  
Pungoteague  
Occupation: Craftsman  
Age: 37*







*“I don’t think that there’s ever been a moment in my life when I wasn’t aware of the wonderful gift of wildlife and our natural surroundings. Believe me, it is a gift. On the East Coast, it’s easy to go about the business of our lives without really being in touch with things that aren’t man-made. But there’s another world out there, coexisting (barely) with us. Virginia’s Eastern Shore is this other world. Somehow, it has retained just enough of Nature’s generosity to remind us that concrete and glass cubes aren’t man’s natural habitat. The Shore beckons us back to the sea. It stirs some primitive urge to fish, hunt and gather. It reminds us where we came from. Sadly, this may be the greatest threat to the Shore. Its very appeal threatens to be its undoing. Virginia’s Eastern shore just might be one of the East Coast’s last battlegrounds in the old war of development versus natural habitat. The outcome will tell us much about ourselves.”*

*Dwight Dyke*







Top left: Dwight Dyke.  
Above: Great egret; photo by Dwight Dyke.



